

# Discovery of Cape Verde Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* on Fogo, Cape Verde Islands

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Découverte de la Rousserolle du Cap-Vert *Acrocephalus brevipennis* à Fogo, Îles du Cap Vert. En octobre 2004, la Rousserolle du Cap-Vert *Acrocephalus brevipennis* a été découverte à Fogo. Cette espèce, qui est classée comme Menacée d'extinction, était auparavant connue seulement de Santiago et São Nicolau; elle est considérée comme éteinte à Brava. A Fogo, elle se trouvait principalement dans des plantations de café avec quelques arbres fruitiers, et également dans des petits champs de maïs avec des plants de café. Au total, 32 mâles chanteurs ont été notés; un individu a été capturé et photographié. L'étude étant limitée à des points d'observation, on peut supposer que l'espèce est plus répandue sur l'île. Il est recommandé d'organiser des inventaires supplémentaires, afin de déterminer la répartition précise de l'espèce, ses préférences en matière d'habitat, les menaces qui pèsent sur elle et les actions de conservation possibles.

Cape Verde Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis*, an Endangered species confined to the Cape Verde Islands, was until 1998 believed to survive only on the island of Santiago (BirdLife International 2004). Historically, it was also known from São Nicolau and Brava, where it was thought to be extinct. Rumours of the warbler's occurrence on Fogo had remained unsubstantiated (Hazevoet 1995). The discovery, in 1997, in the Centro de Zoologia, Lisbon, of a previously unreported specimen taken in October 1970 on São Nicolau, where the species was last recorded in 1924, provided new impetus for a thorough search of the island and, in February 1998, eight territories were located (Hazevoet 1999, Hazevoet *et al.* 1999). Further surveys in 2001 and 2003 showed that the species probably occurred at only three locations (i.e. the same as those found in 1998), with a maximum of ten pairs (Hazevoet 2003, Donald *et al.* 2004). On Brava, where it was formerly scarce, there have been no records since 1969 (Frade 1976, Hazevoet 1993, 1995). On Santiago, where the population is estimated not to exceed *c.*500 pairs, the species is in decline as a result of habitat loss due to successive droughts and an increasing human population (Hazevoet 1995, BirdLife International 2004).

In October 2004, we visited the Cape Verdes mainly with the aim of studying the distribution of Cape Verde Warbler. First, however, we visited the island of Fogo to climb its 2,829 m-high volcano, the only one active in the islands, and to collect data on the local birdlife. We travelled to the

north of the island, where the north-east trade wind, with its regularly associated cloud cover, has favoured the development of a fertile area, in contrast to the rest of the island which is extremely dry. On 18 October, we started from the small village of Pai António (*c.*490 m a.s.l.), from which a trail leads to the Chã das Caldeiras. Noticing that the habitat, which consisted mainly of coffee and maize plantations, scattered fruit trees and narrow ravines choked with shrubs, may be suitable for Cape Verde Warbler, we played its vocalisations from Chappuis (2000) on our tape-recorder. At the first attempt, at the southern extremity of the village, we acquired an immediate response from two birds. One of these was subsequently trapped and photographed (Figs. 1–2).

In the area of the Ribeira Pedra Aguda and Ribeira Coxo, we recorded 24 males, several of which sang without recourse to playback, whereas others sang only in response to such stimulation. In the latter case, the birds appeared in pairs; this happened ten times (Fig. 3). They occurred at 490–950 m in terrain partially characterised by small ravines (Fig. 4). The record at the highest elevation was immediately below a forested area. The species was found mainly in coffee plantations with scattered mango, orange, papaya and banana trees (Figs. 5–7). The birds were, however, also observed in small maize fields with coffee bushes. Numerous Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla* and a few Spectacled Warblers *S. conspicillata* occurred in the same habitats. A Blackcap observed in *Eucalyptus* forest on Monte Velha imitated parts of Cape Verde Warbler song.



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Further exploration of the Pai António region, on 21–22 October, to the edge of the Ribeira Fonte Gatinha and the Espia de Baixo, and south-east to Cutelo Alto, produced more sightings. In total, at least 32 males (including at least 16 pairs) were recorded. The birds occurred mainly in coffee plantations. It should be noted that the species was found in coffee plantations on São Nicolau as early as 1897 (Alexander 1897). A spot-check c.5 km further west, above the village of Ribeira Ilhéu, yielded only a single singing individual in a ravine choked with shrubs. The surrounding area was dominated by maize, with coffee bushes occurring only very locally. A search in the north-west, near Fontainhas, produced no sightings. It can, however, be assumed that Cape Verde Warbler also occurs in the well-vegetated northern part of Fogo.

The discovery of Cape Verde Warbler on Fogo offers further possibilities for the continued survival of this species. Our results, which due to the limited time available, were based only on spot-checks, provide a good reason for further studies of the species, above all of its distribution, habitat requirements, threats and possible conservation measures.

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### Captions to figures on opposite page

Figures 1–2. Cape Verde Warbler / Rousserolle du Cap-Vert *Acrocephalus brevipennis*, Fogo, 18 October 2004 (J. Hering)

Figure 3. Two Cape Verde Warblers *Acrocephalus brevipennis*, reacting to taped calls, in a coffee plantation, Fogo, 18 October 2004 (J. Hering)

Deux Rousserolles du Cap-Vert *Acrocephalus brevipennis* dans une plantation de café, réagissant à la repasse de leurs vocalisations, Fogo, 18 octobre 2004 (J. Hering)

Figure 4. A view of the area in the north of Fogo where Cape Verde Warblers *Acrocephalus brevipennis* were found, 18 October 2004 (J. Hering)

La zone dans le nord de Fogo où les Rousserolles du Cap-Vert *Acrocephalus brevipennis* ont été découvertes, 18 octobre 2004 (J. Hering)

Figures 5–7. Views of the habitat near Pai António, 21 October 2004 (J. Hering)

L'habitat près de Pai António, 21 octobre 2004 (J. Hering)

Figure 8. Cape Verde Warbler / Rousserolle du Cap-Vert *Acrocephalus brevipennis* (J. Hering)